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PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS: NEWS CONFERENCE OPENING STATEMENT
TUESDAY, MAY 22, 1984

Good evening, I have a statement. We have an important visitor in Washington -- Napoleon Duarte, the President-elect of El Salvador. The President-elect and I yesterday issued a joint statement in which we agreed on three major objectives for Central America: the strengthening of democratic institutions, the improvement of living standards, and increased levels of U.S. security assistance to defend against violence from both the extreme left and the extreme right.

The election of Napoleon Duarte is the latest chapter in a trend toward democracy throughout Latin America. In Central America, El Salvador now joins Costa Rica and Honduras in having a democratically-elected government. Democracy in Central America is a fundamental goal of our policy in that region, but continued progress toward that goal requires our assistance. Most of our aid -- three-quarters of it -- is economic assistance. But security assistance is essential to help all those who must protect themselves against the expanded Soviet bloc, Cuban, and Nicaraguan export of subversion.

Also, as I said in my speech to the Nation on May 9, we must support the aspirations of democratic opposition groups in Nicaragua who oppose the Sandinista aggression against their neighbors and who are seeking genuinely democratic elections in Nicaragua as the Sandinistas promised the OAS in 1979.

Peace can only be achieved in Central America if the forces of democracy are strong. We strongly support multilateral efforts toward peace, especially the Contadora process. However, no lasting peace settlement through the Contadora process can be achieved unless there is simultaneous implementation of all the Contadora objectives -- including genuinely democratic elections in Nicaragua. The freedom-fighters in Nicaragua have promised to lay down their arms and to participate in genuinely democratic elections if the Sandinistas will permit them.

Our Congress faces some historic decisions this week. Those who struggle for freedom everywhere are watching to see whether America can still be counted upon to support its own ideals. The people of El Salvador are watching. The freedom-fighters of Nicaragua are watching; Nicaragua's threatened neighbors are watching; and the enemies of freedom are watching as well. Our balanced policy can succeed if the Congress provides the resources for all elements of that policy, as outlined in the bipartisan recommendations of the Kissinger Commission. But if the Congress offers too little support, it will be worse than doing nothing at all. The success of communism in Central America poses the threat that 100 million people from Panama to the open border on our south could come under the control of pro-Soviet regimes.

The Congress has the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to brave people risking their lives for the cause of liberty and democracy in Central America. The Congress also has the opportunity to reaffirm our bipartisan tradition, which will tell

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the world we are united when our vital interests are at stake. I am asking the Members of the Congress to make that commitment.

Now, tonight's first question will be from Maureen Santini. Incidentally, this is a double first for Maureen -- her first first question in her new role as the AP's Chief White House Correspondent. Maureen?